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The Retiring President's Address
To the Eighth Annual Meeting of SRC

"Wings of Eagles"

By Paul D. Williams

I HAVE always been intrigued by a passage from Isaias the Prophet: "Youth shall faint and labor and young men shall fall by infirmity. But they that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall take wings of eagles."

A picture of that strength was made known by Almighty God on Mount Sinai when He said to Moses, "You have seen what I have done to the Egyptians." But, without recalling further the plagues of Egypt or the passage through the Red Sea, He continued, "How I have carried you upon wings of eagles, and have taken you to Myself."

Wings of eagles! What stimulating thoughts come to us as we see the eagle sweeping ever upward towards the blue of the sky; soaring against the swiftest wind and through the bitterest ice and snow to find his home high among the mountain crags; hovering high in the clear ether, as if suspended there by the unseen Hand of God!

It is not surprising that the Romans chose the eagle for the standards of their victorious armies. Or that, when our own nation was born, the emblem selected was the eagle — a symbol of freedom under God.

It seems to me that a Southerner, when he thinks back on the emergence of the United States as a new nation, must always feel pride admixed with pain. Pride because the South gave to those times men whose spirits truly soared like eagles — men like Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Mason, who led their countrymen in a quest for freedom and human dignity which has never been surpassed. Their vision had no petty sectional limits; it carried far beyond the boundaries of their state, their region, even the young nation which they led into existence. They gave voice and action to aspirations that can be found, however mute and repressed, wherever the human heart beats. And we might pause to reflect that hearts today, throughout the world, are beating in the tempo of that brave time.

Surely, then, no people have a better right to be proud of a heritage than we in the South. But how much sharper that makes the pain when our thoughts turn to the century and a

half that have followed. With the burgeoning of the cotton economy, we produced a leadership which turned its back on human freedom and embraced human slavery, which set its hand against the new industry in favor of plantation agriculture, which repudiated democratic government and held jealously to a narrow, aristocratic rule. Few indeed were the eagles that took wing in the Southern skies then. From that day the South's leaders, with few exceptions, followed a course of sectionalism, of nullification, of secession — the negative way which men must always take when they seek to defend the indefensible.

WASTED TALENT

I do not in the least mean to imply that the South throughout that long period yielded an inferior grade of people. History's roster of distinction in that era bears the name of many a Southerner outstanding in ability, intelligence, and courage. The tragedy is that so much of that ability was wasted in obstruction, so much of that intelligence in rationalizing oppression, so much of that courage fighting for unjust principles. How much could have been accomplished if all that energy and talent had been devoted to expanding the horizons of democracy!

The South has indeed produced some mighty eagles during her proud past history. But, unfortunately, she has also produced an over-abundance of sparrows.

All of us are familiar with the golden legend of the "Old South" — a South of high romance. But, underneath all the glitter, it was a South of defeatism and frustration. Worst of all, it was a South of indecision and bad decision. The Old South thought in terms of states rights, slavery, secession, and plantation agriculture. The Old South let itself go overboard for certain amenities of life — poetic speech, chivalry, lavender and old lace, banjo-playing, julep-sipping, that indescribable thing known as Southern hospitality, moonlight shining on sweet magnolia trees.

But the trouble was that the moonlight shone not only on the lovely magnolia trees, but also on unpainted houses and eroded soil — worse still, the moonlight shone on eroded human beings.

That has been the great tragedy of the South — the waste and erosion of her land and her people. Because land and people are what make up a culture, a civilization, and give a chance for survival. When you waste your land and people, you forfeit your future; you write your own obituary. If you are not already dead, you are at least fast dying. Death is only a matter of time.

What must you do to outrace death? You have to inject new life; get the glucose tanks working; put something in the blood stream; erect an oxygen tent; if necessary, you have to perform a major operation.

ANOTHER CHANCE

The South at last is doing precisely those things, and now she wants another chance to walk with dignity before the whole world. She wants another chance to prove her greatness. The new Dixie chorus which is being sung today by an ever increasing army of valiant sons and daughters throughout the South is far removed from the ancient and strident Rebel yell. The new chorus is rather a humble prayer and it goes something like this:

Save us, O Lord, from that "respectable" mediocrity which for too long has stifled conscience and leadership in the South. Deliver us from the wiles of little men who mask their petty themes of prejudice and self-interest in thundering phrases. Give us courage to pay less heed to the opinions of men and more to the laws of God. Show us again, O Lord, Your noble design for the salvation of all men. And help us to follow the star of truth — Your truth — with heads unbowed even in defeat, knowing that only in darkness can we see the stars.

That prayer will not be fulfilled easily or without sacrifice; for it is no simple matter to reverse the direction of more than a hundred years. As all of us here know only too well, the South's present-day leadership is still shackled in varying degrees to the ignoble doctrine of white supremacy. Even the best of our regional leaders in public life evidently feel it necessary to withhold a part of their loyalty from the American ideal; they still reserve a corner of their minds for the undemocratic idea that Negroes, solely because of race, can properly be denied the full stature of citizenship. That, mind you, is the best — and most genteel — of that leadership. The worst and crudest promulgate a dogma which, by any civilized standard, is obscene.

TWO BASIC CHANGES

When you lose more than a hundred years of progress, you have to work diligently to make up for lost time — but you can still come out on top if you do two things. You have to change the institutions that put the South behind the times, and you have to change the ideas that made possible the erection of the wrong institutions. It is with such a purpose that the South of today must work. We must remember that it is not human strength that must be harnessed by our Southern society so much as the human mind. And, in the long run, the human mind will never give up its striving for anything less than equality of respect. Our Southern society will fit itself to achieve in the new age in proportion as it casts aside the distinctions and discriminations which it inherited from the ante-bellum South.

LESSONS OF HISTORY

There is hope in the South today. More than hope — the first bright beginnings of an era of human equality. And that era will unfold all the more rapidly if we are attentive to the lessons of history. The South's leadership in the nation was lost, in a very real sense, when the cotton gin was invented. Under the impact of that discovery, men's minds turned toward the wealth to be gained from slave labor in a feudal economy. The most favored and gifted group in the region succumbed to that powerful temptation. Even some of our religious leaders came to distort the basic teachings of their faith in an attempt to justify that course. Such was the power of material self-interest.

But today the tide of that same self-interest is running the other way, if those still wearing the blinders of the past can only be brought to see it. The South today is no longer significantly tied to plantation cotton. Instead, we find an emerging pattern of diversified and mechanized farming, with modern industry the backbone of the economy. The human exploitation, the enforcement of caste, which accompanied the earlier system is not only outmoded; it is a serious liability.

A strong industrial economy demands a society of free men, rewarded in proportion to their skill and achievement, sharing fully the fruits

of modern production. Only by building that kind of society will the South become a great industrial area. But having achieved that, the South will have gained much more: It will have freed the energies of its people from the old stultifying web of racial fears and antagonisms. It will have redeemed its great early heritage, and may once again give to the nation leaders "with wings of eagles."

It is our hope and belief in the Southern Regional Council that we can play a significant part in reawakening our region to the ideals that animated the Founding Fathers. That may sometimes appear a hopelessly ambitious aim; for who among us has not been dismayed by the fact that the forces which divide men seem to have so much more worldly power than those which draw men together?

OUR PRECIOUS ASSET

Yet we have one precious asset in the Southern Regional Council which no amount of power, position, or influence can offset: Our purpose derives from that deceptively simple but mighty truth which is the essence of the Judeo-Christian tradition — the inescapable, indestructible truth that all men are brothers. St. Paul says, "We are members one of another." Even a small number standing together in the name of God's truth can accomplish wonders.

Consider for a moment what this Council is: A democracy in microcosm; a body of men and women united in common purpose and respect, without distinction as to race or creed, economic status or national origin. The mere existence of such a group in the South, I submit, is in itself of the greatest importance. No truth is readily apparent unless it is demonstrated. Accordingly, it is no small part of our function to demonstrate to the South and to the Nation — and in these times I may well add "to the world" — that Southerners can live and work together in full democracy.

ATMOSPHERE FOR LEADERSHIP

Although there are some in our number whose outstanding qualities have commanded recognition, in the South and in the Nation, most of us can make no claim to greatness. Yet individually, and collectively in SRC, we can make a vital contribution to the leadership of the South. Through our words and actions we can help create the atmosphere in which sound leadership can once again flourish. And we can do so, I believe, with confidence that the future is ours.

We cannot do all the things that need to be done in the South, in the nation, and in the world by ourselves alone. Our strength must be placed in the Hands of God, Who will give the increase, Who is no respecter of persons because of class, or race, or any other artificial distinction.

When we do not accomplish everything demanded by the precepts of God's moral law and the tenets of American democracy, we have to recognize the existence of evil in the world. We are only weak, stumbling individuals, who stumbled out of the Garden of Eden and who, despite our greatest efforts, will continue to stumble until at last we stumble back into Abraham's bosom — back into the arms of our Lord and God. The words of St. Paul are still true after all these years: "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places."

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A Message from SRC's New President

The Way of the Southern Regional Council

By Marion A. Wright

IN ASSUMING the presidency of the Southern Regional Council, I am sure you would wish me to attempt to express, however inadequately, some measure of our appreciation of the truly exceptional services rendered by Mr. Williams during the past six years.

REDUCTION OF BARRIERS

The most significant change taking place in the South today is not found in the removal of industry to the South, in the transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy, or in the elevation of physical standards of living — as important as such changes may be. It is to be found in the reduction and dissolution of artificial barriers which men have reared among themselves.

For these barriers meant the exclusion from participation in public affairs of a large and important segment of our people. They meant the failure to utilize all of our available skills and talents and brains. There is no waste comparable in tragedy to waste of skills and talents and brains. With all of them wisely employed we have no problems beyond solution.

I hope we may say without undue immodesty that in the steady reduction of these barriers this Council has had some part. And for the past six years, in all of its enterprises and exertions, Mr. Williams has been the guiding genius.

We are disposed to think of statesmanship as being an art practiced exclusively in governmental circles, in Washington, in state capitals, in legislative or executive office. Without the slightest disparagement of any Southern governor or legislature, I am prepared to support the thesis that during the past six years statesmanship in the South has had its finest expression and flowering in the activities of the Southern Regional Council.

AGELESS INSTRUMENTS

It has steadfastly resisted the temptation to do the dramatic and the spectacular things which capture headlines and draw friends of the moment. It has chosen rather to use ancient and familiar tools — science, reason, logic, and persuasion. The steady, persistent, day-by-day use of these ageless instruments has eroded the foundation and bases upon which discrimination rests.

I see no reason to discard them now. Always in the past they have been the means by which the minds and hearts of men have been brought to embrace honorable change, to give up what is merely traditional and historic for what is wise and right. They have worked in the past and always they will work. For they appeal to conscience — and conscience is the ultimate dominant force in human affairs.

SRC Calls for Regional Changes To Check Spread of Violence

On Christmas night a bomb was exploded under the bedroom of a house in Mims, Florida — and the blast echoed around the world. Killed in the explosion was Mr. Harry T. Moore, a state official of the NAACP; Mrs. Moore died a few days later. This savage act climaxed a long series of unpunished depredations by dynamite. (See opposite page.) The following statement on the regional implications of that pattern of violence was issued by the Southern Regional Council on January 7; stories based on it appeared in newspapers throughout the country.

The Southern Regional Council regards the recent outbreaks of violence in Florida as a grave and urgent warning to the South. Such atrocities are only extreme examples of a general lack of regard for the individual. The climate which produces them is one of daily insult, intimidation, and the lesser forms of violence directed against a whole segment of our population. Surely no further proof is needed that such attitudes, once they erupt into terrorism, recognize no bounds of race or religion or other grouping; no one is safe.

It is imperative that the assassins of Mr. and Mrs. Harry T. Moore and the perpetrators of the Miami bombings be brought to justice. But that by itself will not be enough to prevent recurrences. Two basic and far-reaching changes must be effected in our region with the greatest possible speed.

First, we must rid our public life of irresponsible efforts — found in Florida as in other Southern states — to exploit racial antagonisms for political advantage. This fostering of prejudice is not only immoral and conducive to violence, but is a bar to material progress as well. The modern industrial society to which the South aspires will not flourish without a democratic system in which no group is denied dignity, equality before the law, and the full practice of citizenship.

Second, if the pattern of violence is to be kept from spreading, local law enforcement agencies throughout the South must be brought abreast of professional standards of fairness and efficiency.

In the case of the outrages in Miami and Mims, Fla., both local and federal police authorities deserve commendation for the diligence with which they are seeking the guilty parties. Yet even Miami, a large metropolis with a modern police force, has found it difficult to prevent, control, and punish recent lawlessness. By contrast, the lower police standards in most of the region are an invitation to private violence; indeed, they have on many occasions fostered the resort to extra-legal actions.

To help remedy this shortcoming the Southern Regional Council will soon launch a Southwide effort to encourage local citizens to work for more skilled and impartial police systems. Material has been prepared to guide and assist community groups in that effort. The Council strongly believes that there is no more urgent duty confronting Southerners who want a South purged of violence and terrorism.

A ROUND-UP OF BOMB VIOLENCE

The tragic bombing of the Moore home in Mims, Fla., was preceded and has been followed by similar acts of violence in various Southern states. The effectiveness of explosives as a terrorist weapon is evident in the fact that, to date, none of the perpetrators has been convicted. In only four cases — indicated below — have the guilty persons been apprehended, and they have not yet come to trial.

Following are examples of violence by bombing drawn from newspaper reports of the past two years:

APRIL 13, 1950, BIRMINGHAM, ALA. Dynamite caused an estimated $11,000 damage to a Negro dentist's newly built combination home and office. The building, not yet occupied, was in an area zoned for Negroes, but was across the street from white residences.

APRIL 22, 1950, BIRMINGHAM, ALA. An explosion shattered the front porch and living room of a Negro contractor's residence. The three occupants, including a small child, escaped injury. The house had been previously dynamited in October of 1949.

MAY 13, 1950, CHATTANOOGA, TENN. A Negro home in a formerly all-white neighborhood was dynamited for the second time. Although the house was badly damaged, two children sleeping near the point of explosion miraculously escaped injury.

SEPTEMBER 17, 1950, NASHVILLE, TENN. An explosive charge hurled from a passing automobile loosened concrete and rattled the windows of Negro houses in a six-block area. Three weeks before, a cross had been burned in the same section.

DECEMBER 13, 1950, BARTOW, FLA. A pre-dawn blast did approximately $5,000 worth of damage to a restaurant owned by a city commissioner and his brother. The restaurant owners had supported the controversial Negro annex to the municipal hospital.

DECEMBER 22, 1950, BIRMINGHAM, ALA. A bomb partially destroyed the new brick home of a Negro woman who led a court fight against the city's racial zoning law. Although scarcely a room escaped damage, the six occupants were unhurt.

MARCH 24, 1951, ATLANTA, GA. Several sticks of dynamite were exploded in the backyard of an unoccupied house in a predominantly white neighborhood which had recently been sold to Negroes. In July two members of the Association of Georgia Klans, one of them second in command to the "Imperial Wizard," were indicted for the bombing.

APRIL 27, 1951, WAKE FOREST, N. C. Dynamite blasts were set off near a picket line at a struck textile mill. Each of the disputing parties charged the other with the act. Other dynamitings in connection with labor disputes have occurred at Danville, Va., Morristown, Tenn., Cedartown, Ga., and Pikeville, Ky.

JUNE 5, 1951, MIAMI, FLA. A bomb was exploded in the newly constructed Northside Jewish Center.

JUNE 17, 1951, ATLANTA, GA. A Negro-owned house, not yet occupied, was dynamited. Despite extensive damage, the Negro purchaser went ahead with plans to move in.

JUNE 28, 1951, ATLANTA, GA. Another unoccupied house recently bought by Negroes was dynamited.

AUGUST 11, 1951, DALLAS, TEX. Two white men confessed to the bombing of Negro-owned houses in a south Dallas fringe neighborhood. Within the preceding seventeen months, Negro homes had been the target of thirteen bombings.

SEPTEMBER 22, 1951, MIAMI, FLA. An explosion set off in Carver Village — a housing project recently converted to Negro occupancy — shattered a wall of a vacant unit and blew off the roof. A second bombing of Carver Village took place on December 2; several other attempted bombings failed.

DECEMBER 2, 1951, MIAMI, FLA. Bombings occurred in the Hebrew School and Congregation and in a white residential area. No casualties resulted.

DECEMBER 27, 1951, MIAMI, FLA. A bomb was exploded in the Coral Gables area following warnings from dynamiters that they planned to strike again and had no preference as to what kind of church they bombed.

DECEMBER 31, 1951, ROME, GA. Three white men set off a dynamite charge near a Negro social club. When apprehended, they declared that the club was a "nuisance" and they were trying to frighten the owners into closing it. As the bombing occurred in the early morning hours, no one was injured.

DECEMBER 31, 1951, CROSSVILLE, ALA. A blast set off by an unidentified man knocked five windows out of a white residence. The sheriff attrib-

uted the bombing to a bootlegging feud. A white suspect was subsequently arrested.

JANUARY 9, 1952, PHENIX CITY, ALA. The home of Hugh Bentley, a local anti-vice leader, was virtually destroyed by a midnight blast. Bentley was absent at the time, but his wife and children were asleep in the house and narrowly escaped death.

JANUARY 13, 1952, COTTONWOOD, ALA. An 18-year-old youth was arrested for bombing a house in which a white woman and her five children were sleeping. There were no serious injuries.

"Wings of Eagles"

(Continued from page 4)

Paul Claudel says, "It is for lack of a skeleton that certain animals live in shells." That points up a choice for us in the Southern Regional Council. We can place ourselves in protective shells, in the hope that these will resist the impact of the South and of the world. Or we in the Southern Regional Council can seek to be vertebrate human beings, with solid, articulate skeletons, capable not merely of resisting the impact of the times, but of having an impact on the South and on the world, shattering the structure of ignorance, inertia, and enslavement. That is the big job for the Southern Regional Council. It is also the big piece of unfinished business for the South as we face the modern world.

Wings of eagles! Can we be content with anything less? The Founding Fathers were not. Benjamin Franklin wanted to make the wild turkey our national emblem. But, after six years of debate, on June 20, 1782, the bald eagle was chosen by Congress as our embodiment of pride, power, and courage.

When God made the oyster, He gave him complete economic and social security. The oyster is insulated from the world without by a hard protective shell; when hungry, all the oyster has to do is open his mouth and food rushes in. But when God made the eagle, He said in effect: "The sky is the limit. I will give you wings, but you have to build your own nest." And those wings of freedom were sufficient. The eagle built his nest on the loftiest crag, where storms are his daily environment. But the eagle is not afraid. He is indomitable, serene, confident. He is the king of the birds. He is the king of everything that flies. He is the emblem of America!

And as the American eagle takes flight to his highest crag and looks down on the Southland, may he see a people unafraid, confident, and serene, a people whose brave beginnings have yet to find fulfillment, whose sins of the past must be atoned for, whose proudest claim for the future can be briefly stated: "We have yet to write our noblest deeds; we have yet to sing our greatest songs; because we who hope in the Lord shall renew our strength and we shall take wings of eagles."

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